

Lifestyles | HOME TOWN HERO

By Pam Burke & Donna McBride

I want to tell a story. The ending hasn't really happened yet. This is a journey about my life. You see I was a foster kid along with my brothers and sister. I was afraid from the day we were taken away from our parents.

That fear has been my shadow, turning into distrust, shame, feeling sorry for myself and depending only on myself. Nothing was explained to me and my future was uncertain. I was separated from my family. I was so confused; why did my parents let this happen to me, was it my fault, don't I deserve a family? What did I do wrong?

I grew up in the foster care system drifting in and out of relationships and trying to be 'normal' whatever that was. But the fact is, I never felt 'normal.' How can that happen when you don't know from day to day where you will be living, where you will be going to school or who will be there for you. I was on 'survival mode' just trying to get by. I had 4 different case workers, lived in 6 placements including juvenile detention and a number of group homes and attended 5 different schools.

Every time I had to change places my personal stuff was usually tossed in a trash bag. Some of my childhood

...the fact is, I never felt 'normal.' How can that happen when you don't know from day to day where you will be living, where you will be going to school or who will be there for you.

is just a blur with no school pictures, no mementos of achievements from school or a parent cheering me on at my little league games. Living in the foster care system meant that no one was permanent in my life. It was a revolving door of case workers, attorneys, foster parents, therapist, teachers and judges.

Then I turned 18, a time for young people to spread their wings... I was an adult in the eyes of the court; 'aging out' of the child welfare system is what they call it. I call it fending for myself. I had never paid rent, bought groceries or managed my own expenses. I went from someone telling me what to do and how to do it on a daily basis to being lonely and afraid. On my own for the first time in my life, I had no one to catch me if I fell... I was responsible for surviving in a world on my own. I felt so alone - again.

As a child I was an innocent victim but as an adult I had to make decisions and those decisions would help me to shape my destiny. I was forced into a system that tried to care for me

but did not prepare for being an adult. I knew I could continue to be a victim of my circumstances or I could turn those negatives memories in my life into motivation to push forward. If only I had made more positive choices-I would have no regrets. I cannot erase my past but I can tackle those obstacles head on and move forward.

Even though I grew up away from my family, who were dysfunctional at best, I met some great people that looked beyond my fears and distrust and accepted me for who I was. One of those people included my Court Appointed Special

Advocate (CASA) Volunteer. He listened to me

when no one else was willing, he believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. He advocated for my best interest in/out of court and he encouraged me to follow my passion. I will never forget what my CASA did for me even though I didn't always tell him thank you.


My journey is not over but I do see light at the end of the tunnel. After struggling with homelessness and not being able to hold down a job, I finally earned my high school diploma. I now have a fulltime job and go to school part-time. I am unsure of what I want to be when I "grow up"...but I do know that I have forgiven my past, triumphed over the challenges and can now focus on the person I was meant to be.

My 'hometown hero's' are all the kids in foster care that have decided to change their life by looking beyond their past to a future that is whole and bright. These youth cannot do it alone. They need the support and compassion of healthy adults and a community willing to give them a chance.

Do you remember Fred Roger's from Mister Roger's Neighborhood? I remember watching him and wishing life was that simple. In an interview one time, he said,

These youth cannot do it alone. They need the support and compassion of healthy adults and a community willing to give them a chance.

"We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say 'it's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider these people my heroes."

Don't you want to be someone's hero? 

child placement heart family happiness
court case worker plan
Foster care
support healing trauma
home hope heart
loved
safe heart